

A Study on the Theme Orientation and Emotional Identity of Metaphorical Network Hot Words in Short Videos

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In the wave of internet culture, short videos have become an indispensable medium for social communication. The metaphorical hot words contained within them serve as a unique linguistic phenomenon that leads topics and focuses attention, greatly enriching the expressive layers and rhetorical charm of short videos, and significantly enhancing the video's theme orientation and emotional identification. This research aims to explore the relationship between the use of metaphorical Internet buzzwords in short videos and the thematic and emotional orientation. The study adopts a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, taking 10 videos with over 10,000 likes posted by a well-known blogger on Xiaohongshu in 2024 as the research object, transcribing the text, forming research corpora, and conducting multi-dimensional cognitive analysis on them. The study shows that about half of short videos contain metaphorical hot words. Different types of metaphorical hot words can trigger different emotional reactions from fans, especially humorous metaphorical hot words that can stimulate fans' emotional identification and resonance. In addition, in terms of fan participation, videos using metaphorical hot words tend to attract more fan attention than those that do not: these videos not only attract more fans to watch and like, but also trigger more comments and sharing behaviors. In summary, short videos cleverly use metaphors to create internet hot words, significantly enhancing the video's thematic guidance and emotional resonance, manifested in creating popular topics, clarifying guiding themes, enhancing content attractiveness, and stimulating strong emotional identification, thereby promoting interactive behaviors such as likes and shares. These findings provide a reference for research in related fields such as metaphor, communication studies, and sociology.

Keywords: short videos, internet hot words, metaphor, theme orientation, emotional identity

Introduction

With the popularization and deepening of the Internet, network language has become an important way of modern human communication. Among them, network buzzwords, as a unique phenomenon of network language, are simple, intuitive and expressive. They can often spread quickly and become a symbol of a certain period or event. These buzzwords not only reflect the reality of society, but also reveal people's mentality, values and emotional appeals in a specific era.

Research Background

In recent years, short videos have risen rapidly, owing to their concise, vivid, and intuitive characteristics. They have become a pivotal medium for Internet content dissemination. The popularity of short videos is mainly due to the following aspects: Firstly, the widespread adoption of 5G technology has significantly enhanced the transmission speed of short videos, offering users a high-definition viewing experience. Furthermore, the ubiquity of smartphones and mobile internet has substantially bolstered the dissemination of short videos. Second, in the era of information explosion, users' demand for information is becoming more and more fragmented and rapid. With its concise characteristics, short video just meets the needs of users to obtain information and entertainment anytime and anywhere. Lastly, algorithmic recommendations and content strategies employed by leading short video platforms have ensured a steady influx of high-quality content, thereby engendering substantial user engagement. Notably, platforms like TikTok and Kuaishou have kindled users' creative fervor and fostered the growth of short video content through challenges and thematic interactions.

The burgeoning popularity of short videos has profoundly impacted society. These videos offer users an intuitive and vivid method for acquiring information, thereby facilitating rapid understanding of current events and the acquisition of new knowledge. Additionally, short video platforms have emerged as a significant space for individuals to share their daily lives, express personal viewpoints, and foster human interaction. Through expressions like *likes*, *comments*, and *shares*, users can cultivate closer relationships with one another. Furthermore, short videos provide a rich array of high-quality entertainment content that caters to diverse user preferences.

The ubiquity of short videos has accelerated the application of network hot words, leveraging their novelty, entertainment value, and ease of dissemination. Such words have rapidly become a pivotal component of short video content due to their timeliness and topicality, which can quickly attract the attention of the audience. In short videos, the use of network hot words can quickly catch the audience's attention and improve the exposure and communication effect of the video.

Network hot words, often characterized by humor, can enhance the appeal of short video content. Their utilization enables creators to produce more vibrant and engaging videos, thereby augmenting viewer experience and satisfaction. These hot words frequently evoke emotional resonance and tap into the psychology of resonance. In the context of short videos, they serve as an effective tool for conveying the emotional attitudes and values of the creators, thus fostering a stronger emotional connection with the audience.

In conclusion, the proliferation and impact of short videos, coupled with the use of network buzzwords, have collaboratively advanced the growth and evolution of internet culture. As technology continues to progress and user preferences shift, it is anticipated that short videos and viral internet terminology will persistently drive innovation and augment the potential of digital content distribution and societal engagement online.

Research Purpose and Questions

The primary objective of this paper is to conduct an in-depth examination and analysis of the linguistic phenomena associated with metaphorical network hot words within the context of short-form video media. This

study aims to explore the impact of metaphorical internet hot words in short videos on the theme guidance of the videos themselves and the emotional identification of the audience. Furthermore, from the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, we investigate the metaphorical mechanisms that drive the use of these hot words in short videos, seeking to comprehend their interaction with the audience's cognitive structure. This study extends beyond mere linguistic analysis; it delves into the social and cultural significance underpinning these metaphorical Internet buzzwords, exploring their role in reflecting and shaping societal culture. Lastly, based on the findings, theoretical or practical recommendations for optimizing the use of metaphorical network hot words in short video production and cultural communication were proposed.

Research Questions:

- (1) How do metaphorical network hot words reflect their influence on video content?
- (2) How to understand the cognitive and social mechanisms of metaphorical Internet hot words to provide information for creating more attractive short video content?

Literature Review

In many studies, we can see that scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on network buzzwords from different perspectives. Some studies have focused on the generation mechanism of network buzzwords, exploring how they are formed and widely disseminated in daily communication. Other studies focus on the social and cultural meaning behind the network buzzwords and how they reflect the mentality of a specific period or group. In addition, as a rhetorical device, the use of metaphor in network buzzwords has also attracted the attention of scholars. How to construct and convey specific meanings through metaphor has become a topic worthy of study.

It is worth noting that network buzzwords are not only limited to text, but also involve multimodal expressions, such as pictures, videos, etc. In these multimodal expressions, the use of metaphor and metonymy provides a rich level and depth for the expression of network language. This has also led researchers to explore how to identify and interpret these rhetorical devices in a multimodal context.

The purpose of this review is to summarize the relevant research in the field of network language and metaphor, focusing on the analysis of the generation, dissemination and influence of network buzzwords, as well as the role and significance of metaphor in this process.

Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics

Metaphor research has shifted from rhetoric to cognitive linguistics and has continued to expand and deepen with the development of cognitive science. The definition and function of metaphor is to describe a concept with another concept, involving the target domain and the source domain. It is the core cognitive tool and way of thinking, which runs through human thinking and cognitive processes (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Metaphorical mapping is to understand metaphor through the mapping relationship between the source domain and the target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Multimodal Metaphor

The multimodal metaphor refers to the metaphor in which the source domain and/or the target domain are simultaneously expressed or activated by multiple modes (Forceville, 2024).

The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) proposed by Pragglejaz Group is a systematic approach to reliably identify metaphorically used words in discourse. The MIP method emphasizes that the identification of metaphors depends not only on intuition but also on clear standards and procedures, which helps to improve the reliability and consistency of metaphor research (Pragglejaz Group, 2007).

Sweetser explores the use of metaphor and metonymy in advertising, and how these rhetorical devices construct meaning and audience perspective in multimodal advertising, which is similar to the effect of metaphorical Internet buzzwords in short videos (Sweetser, 2017).

Internet Buzzwords and Metaphors

Internet buzzwords are linguistic constructs that capture the essence of contemporary online communication. Zhou Yan defines them as “a language system that concentrates on the content of events and public emotions” (Zhou, 2021). These buzzwords are characterized by their brevity, memorability, and rapid spread, often encapsulating public sentiment toward social events (Zhou, 2021).

The socio-cultural impact of internet buzzwords is significant, as they reflect the collective consciousness and attitudes of netizens towards societal developments. Zhou Yan emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of research in this area, involving fields such as Journalism and Communication Studies, Philosophy, Culture, Linguistics, and Sociology (Zhou, 2021).

The emergence and evolution of internet buzzwords are linked to the democratization of information and the empowerment of individuals in the digital age. As Zhou (2021) suggested, the internet has revolutionized traditional communication models, enabling a broader demographic to participate in public discourse. In his book, Zhou (2021) analyzed how hot words spread in network group communication, which is instructive for understanding the propagation path and influence of hot words in short videos.

Self-deprecating internet catchphrases are prevalent among young people, forming a new online youth subculture (Guo, 2023). The production of such discourse not only regulates the mentality of the youth and alleviates social pressure but also brings risks of spiritual exhaustion and self-loss, social acceptance risks, and political identification risks. There is a solid “prairie” group behind the Internet buzzwords, which has high expectations for the future of the Internet as a political medium (Zhou & Chen, 2024). The signifier and the signified of network buzzwords are related, and the generation of these words has its specific social and cultural background (Zhang, 2020). With the development and popularization of the Internet, network buzzwords have become a special phenomenon in the development of network language.

Compared with the relevant research, it can be seen that they all pay attention to the generation, dissemination and influence of network buzzwords, but the research perspectives and methods are different. Some studies have focused on the influence of Internet buzzwords on youth groups and the social psychology and social changes they reflect (Cai & Zhao, 2022; Guo, 2023). Other studies pay more attention to the linguistic features of network catchwords, such as the relationship between signifier and signified, homophonic motivation (Zhang, 2020; Fang & Li, 2023); some studies focus on the communication mechanism and influencing factors of online buzzwords, including the role of social media, language attributes and user needs (Zhou and Chen, 2024).

In his paper, Steen discusses the interaction between metaphor and metonymy in language based on a theoretical framework, which provides a profound insight into the multi-level meaning and use of hot words in short videos (Steen, 2004).

Based on the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics, especially the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, some scholars have analyzed the metaphor and metonymy in advertisements and adopted the multimodal analysis method to consider how the language, image, sound and other modalities in advertisements work together, and how the interaction between these modalities affects the overall effect of advertisements (Bolognesi, 2018; Forceville, 2002; Sweetser, 2017).

Methodology

This session shows how the materials be collected and what tools will also be used for collection. Besides, the process of choosing the internet hot words and identifying metaphorical internet hot words will be illustrated.

Corpus Selection and Preprocessing

This study primarily utilizes 10 high-quality video content of a Xiaohongshu blogger as its core corpus. In this series of videos on the same topic posted by the blogger, 10 short videos with likes exceeding 10,000 were selected. The AI named Dou Bao was used for text extraction, converting the video content into written words. After the transcription was completed, they were each placed into 10 documents for subsequent analysis.

Before conducting the analysis, several preprocessing steps were performed. The first step was text cleaning, which involved removing irrelevant information. This included special characters and excessive punctuation that could affect the subsequent analysis. Besides, the advertisement content in the video also needs to be cleaned.

Identification Process

In the 10 pieces of corpus that have been collected, metaphorical internet hot words are identified and extracted through both manual work and technology. The specific process is divided into two steps: Firstly, determining which internet hot words are present. Internet hot words possess the following characteristics: rapid dissemination, concise form, and dependence on Internet context for understanding (Dou Bao, 2025). By manually reading the 10 articles, the internet hot words that appear are identified. Secondly, determining whether these internet hot words are metaphorical. The identified internet hot words are input into Dou Bao, and instructions are sent for AI judgment. To ensure the accuracy of the results, a final manual check and confirmation are performed, thereby obtaining the articles that use metaphorical internet hot words.

Results

In this study, we carefully selected 10 outstanding short videos from the “working series” posted by a well-known blogger with a huge influence and wide audience base on Xiao Hongshu in 2024, which have received more than 10,000 likes. These videos not only record the daily life and work of the blogger but also trigger widespread discussion and resonance on the Internet with their unique perspective and profound connotations. To deeply explore the linguistic features and social significance behind these videos, we use an

advanced AI technology—DouBao software to accurately and efficiently extract the video copy, and construct a rich and clear research corpus.

In the subsequent analysis process, we fully utilized the intelligent recognition capabilities of AI technology, combined with manual meticulous review and judgment, to successfully distinguish and filter out short video clips containing metaphorical internet hot words from the research corpus. These internet hot words, with their novel and unique expressions, not only enrich the linguistic color of the videos but also subtly convey profound social information and emotional resonance.

After conducting a comprehensive statistical analysis of the data from these 10 videos on key indicators such as likes, comments, collections, and shares, we found that: exactly half of the videos studied skillfully incorporated metaphorical internet hot words. These videos not only sparked more widespread attention and discussion among the audience but also significantly increased viewer engagement, inspiring more frequent collections and sharing. This phenomenon fully demonstrates the important role of metaphorical internet hot words in short video dissemination and their significant enhancement of audience attractiveness. Further analysis revealed that these internet catchwords mostly revolve closely around people's daily work lives, and through the rhetorical device of metaphor, they profoundly reveal the various challenges and difficulties faced by the working class in their work and life in a humorous manner. When viewers immerse themselves in these video content, these metaphorical internet catchwords act like a key, quickly unlocking their emotional gates and enabling them to understand the profound messages and emotional resonance conveyed in the videos more deeply. This resonance not only enhances the viewers' sense of identification with the core information of the videos but also unconsciously shortens the distance between the viewers and the video content, further improving the dissemination effect of short videos.

Besides, the research is likely to elucidate the reflective and influential nature of metaphorical network hot words, illuminating their role as a mirror to societal values and cultural shifts. Furthermore, it will explore their capacity to shape public discourse and social identities.

In light of the findings, this study endeavors to furnish practical recommendations for short video creators and advertisers, emphasizing the strategic use of metaphorical network hot words to amplify content engagement and resonate culturally.

Conclusion

The present study shows that metaphorical network hot words have a significant theme-oriented role and strong emotional identification in short videos. These findings not only provide new perspectives and ideas for us to better understand the dissemination rules and characteristics of network culture but also provide useful references for the creation and dissemination of short video content.

The limitation of the study is that the sample size is only 10 videos published by a well-known blogger in 2024. Second, a lack of comparative analysis of videos from other platforms, other types of bloggers and different periods.

Looking forward to the future, the breadth and depth of research can be further expanded. On one hand, more detailed analysis and comparison can be made for different types and styles of short videos to reveal the mechanism and effect of hot words in different situations. On the other hand, combine the theories and methods

of psychology, sociology and other disciplines to conduct a more in-depth discussion and research on the propagation process and influence mechanism of metaphorical network hot words in short videos.

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